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**AMERICA’S “SHADOW WARRIORS” ON A MISSION TO “KILL PABLO”: FOCUS
ON SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN LIGHT OF AFGHANISTAN**

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AMERICA’S “SHADOW WARRIORS” ON A MISSION TO “KILL PABLO”: FOCUS ON SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN LIGHT OF AFGHANISTAN

Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces. By Tom Clancy with General Carl Stiner (Ret.).
G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 2002; 548 pages; \$29.95 hardcover.

Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World’s Greatest Outlaw. By Mark Bowden. Penguin Books,
New York, 2001; 296 pages; \$14.00 paperback.

The rout in late-2001 of Afghanistan’s Taliban regime brings a timely relevance to two new books about U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) by two prominent American authors. Both make for crisp, fast and fun reading. Both books are likely to be revealing in a voyeuristic sense for overly-sensitive liberals, gratifying for might-makes-right knuckle-draggers...and informative while entertaining for the great majority of us between.

Shadow Warriors is Clancy’s third in his “Commanders” series of non-fiction books. It is a follow-up to *Into the Storm* (published in 1998) about the Army and *Every Man a Tiger* (2000) about the Air Force. While each of the three is a love letter to the military-industrial complex, each also offers a winning blend of technology, history, biography and well-told war stories. Each is co-authored by Clancy and a retired general.

As is the heroic CIA official Jack Ryan in Clancy’s fictional series (e.g., next month *The Sum of All Fears* (1991) on nuclear terrorism will be the latest of these to come out as a movie; the screenplay differs from the book with rogue Russians involved as Baltimore gets nuked), SOF leaders in *Shadow Warriors* are portrayed in an ideal light. Not surprisingly, General Stiner, with whom Clancy co-authored the book, never makes a significant blunder and is

portrayed as an all-knowing visionary of humble origins from a farm in Tennessee. He is depicted almost as a real life Jack Ryan.

Clancy's secret has been to pay others to do the lion's share of his writing since *Red Storm Rising*, actually written by former U.S. Navy destroyer officer Larry Bond in 1986. Clancy again makes a good pick with Carl Stiner who brings substantial credibility to the book. Stiner not only was the second commanding officer of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), but also commanded the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) and other contingency strike forces. Conservatives across the board, and in the Pentagon specifically, love Clancy's works and his right-of-center politics. DoD provides great source material and cooperates extensively with Clancy, no doubt with an eye on garnering best-selling publicity.

In the case of *Shadow Warriors*, somebody called Tony Koltz did most of the actual research and formatted questions to be posed by Stiner, Clancy or himself. Koltz's work is graciously acknowledged by Stiner but not by Clancy. Beyond ensuring a high standard of storytelling, Clancy may have done little beyond offer name recognition to ensure the book's commercial success and collect a hefty check for himself. That should not, however, detract from the substance and material in the book itself.

After curiously beginning with the seizure of the liner *Achille Lauro* in 1985 and not explaining how the incident ended for several chapters, the Clancy/Stiner book launches into a methodical description of the history and development of SOF. This starts with a recollection of work by a three-man OSS Jedburgh team commanded by a lieutenant inserted in mid-1944 into occupied France. The force-multiplying effect of this tiny group was impressive as it worked with both communist and Gaullist resistance forces to harass and tie down Wehrmacht units while keeping in mind the strategic picture -- Patton's exposed right flank.

The Jedburgh's work bears an uncanny resemblance to U.S. efforts in October/November 2001. Both in France and Afghanistan, tiny groups of U.S. soldiers with language and cultural

skills were inserted into hostile environments replete with competing groups of “allies” and faced with ruthless and determined enemies. In both conflicts, air drops of weapons for indigenous forces, calling in air strikes, directing attacks by local troops, while keeping in mind the big picture... were essential factors that contributed to success.

While 1944 is ancient history, it graphically illustrates the short-lived “relative superiority” that SOF forces must have, as well as the essential relationship between good intelligence and SOF. This is an unstated theme throughout both books. It is as relevant today as in 1944.

Although published *after* the September 11th terrorist attacks, Clancy’s book offers the reader disappointingly little on what SOF can do in Afghanistan. Citing legitimate concerns for operational safety, Clancy and Stiner simply point to media reports that U.S. and British SOF troops are in Afghanistan and officiously state that they can be expected to conduct actions related to all their assigned mission areas of responsibility.

Indeed, in the nine pages devoted to “what comes next” after 9-11, Clancy offers no sophisticated analysis. He advocates a simplistic military response. Correctly pointing out that many in the Arab and Islamic world have a blind hatred for America and the West, Clancy and Stiner sophomorically call for a “PSYOPs campaign” to tell people that terrorists do not represent true Islam. That somehow this first step, without going further, is going to deny terrorists popular support and recruits is pathetically wishful thinking. Considering all that Clancy has written about U.S. military and intelligence capabilities, he should know better. It is hard to believe he could not go further to meet his readers’ expectations without jeopardizing U.S. and allied forces. For instance, he could have drawn on some of the detail in USSOCOM PUB 1 *Special Ops in War and Peace*, an *unclassified* DoD publication.

Going through the history of a number of special ops, Clancy/Stiner understandably provide most of their detail on operations in which Stiner was involved, such as the *Achille Lauro* hijacker capture and the invasion of Panama. Indeed, Clancy/Stiner inconsistently put

much of the narrative in first person by Stiner; he was there. In other places, however, he is “Stiner” in the third person. While this is frustrating, the reader can overlook these stylistic bumps by appreciating that most of the details will be new to the vast majority of people, even those working for the U.S. government.

There are many interesting tidbits on little-known incidents, such as the hijacking of an Egyptair 777 to Malta not long after the *Achille Lauro* incident. For instance, a Libyan airport employee in Valletta convinced the Maltese authorities to insist that any assistance be delivered in Italian helicopters, knowing how long that would take. Thus, the Egyptians went ahead on their own with a hostage rescue operation and used far too much explosive. Sixty passengers died, many probably unnecessarily. Most of these central details were not public at the time.

The U.S. intervention in Panama in 1989 makes particularly interesting reading with many important details pulled together, such as how the Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) invites Panama’s rightful leaders to dinner the night of the invasion so they are safe from Manuel Noriega. Amusing is how Noriega, on a date with a prostitute when the intervention began, runs outside a hotel wearing only red bikini underwear and almost is nabbed at a Ranger roadblock near the airport. At one point on the first night of the intervention, the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) has 171 aircraft over Panama. Overall, the JSOTF has some 4400 men involved; Clancy and Stiner catalogue their operations well and in a readable manner.

Similarly, *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Mark Bowden in his 2001 book *Killing Pablo* has put together an entertaining chronicle of the 16-month hunt for Colombian cocaine psychopath Pablo Escobar and the extensive covert U.S. assistance involved. The manhunt ends with the kingpin’s violent death in 1993. SOF generation and rapid exploitation of actionable intelligence is the unspoken but central theme. Bowden is also the author of *Blackhawk Down*, a similarly gripping squad-level account published in 1999 about SOF in Mogadishu. He also

wrote the screenplay of the hit movie of same name released in January 2002. *Bringing the Heat* is Bowdens's potboiler published in 1994 about professional football.

Killing Pablo bears many uncanny resemblances to a 1989 Tom Clancy novel also made into a screenplay, *Clear and Present Danger*. In the movie version, the similarly overweight bad guy has most of Escobar's traits but is called *Escobedo*. Bowden must have seen the film. Hollywood already has plans afoot to make *Killing Pablo* into a movie.

Curiously, the brass in Tampa at USSOCOM loved *Blackhawk Down*, although it portrays an American defeat, while many at this headquarters object to *Killing Pablo*, an ostensible U.S. victory. They believe that Bowden reveals too many SOF sources and methods. Indeed, the book does say what parts of a target building are vulnerable and what mistakes a human target can commit to make himself vulnerable.

Bowden privately responds that although he was not required to do so, he informally vetted his manuscript and removed all passages that could have given away sensitive information. At any rate, Bowden is in the Tampa doghouse...all the way to the bank with this *New York Times* bestseller. Just as when many Muslim clerics condemned Salmon Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, if the brasshats are concerned about Bowden's book, that is all the more reason to read it.

Killing Pablo pulls the reader on a tour through the culture of violence that was so endemic to Colombia well *before* drugs. The corruption that keeps the great mass of Latin Americans dirt poor, in countries with such natural resources and energetic citizens that they should have a first world living standard, is detailed. In this atmosphere, the message of the hedonist Escobar is uncompromisingly simple and effective: take a "*plata o plomo*," literally a "buck or a bullet." He orders the colonel commanding the Colombian 4th Brigade murdered, but only after lengthy torture. Incidentally, if you do not accept Escobar's money and do as instructed, bullets are also pumped into your wife, your kids and your little dog, too. Small wonder in a society that is coming apart, the casually violent Escobar can rise to such heights of power and influence.

As with almost any thoughtful account of life and politics in South America, corruption naturally continues as a theme throughout the book when Escobar “escapes” from “*La Catedral*,” a special mountaintop prison designed by him. Ironically, Escobar has a good deal while “imprisoned” in “*La Catedral*,” since he is fairly safe from the guns of rival drug traffickers. While he deigns to be a “prisoner” there, Escobar not only enjoys a suite of rooms with exercise equipment, big screen TV, giant bed, and all the teenage prostitutes he wants, but has complete freedom to continue to run his cocaine trafficking empire. This even includes bringing people to the “prison” and murdering them there. It is only when a gravely embarrassed President César Gaviria of Colombia orders a crackdown does the outlaw find it necessary to depart. At this point about halfway through the book, the 16-month hunt begins. Escobar is now fair game.

Bowden is not an expert on drug trafficking, much less South America. Indeed, he concedes he spent less than three weeks in Colombia researching his book in 1999-2000. However, Bowden gets lots of Colombia-specific details right to those familiar with the country, even the Hotel Tequendama. He liberally spices the book with Spanish terms and phrases, an important way for a reader to understand important cultural nuances.

Overall, however, Bowden relies too heavily on Americans and American sources. Admittedly, U.S. involvement is so extensive--and inter-agency competition so intense--that the U.S. government has 17 surveillance planes over Escobar’s home city of Medellín at one time, all working the Escobar case. An AWACS is called in to coordinate the flights. The U.S. ambassador holds a competition between the different agencies’ competing systems. Nonetheless, the book may give too much credit to the role, however important, to U.S. operators.

This is because Colombia is a country where traffickers routinely target judges, journalists and family members for murder. When the “Search Bloc,” a secret, elite anti-drug unit of 200 men is formed, thirty of its men are assassinated within two weeks, often with the help of the Medellín police. In the final analysis, the hunt and killing of Escobar takes unimaginable

courage for every Colombian involved. Pablo's death--and Bowden leaves no shred of doubt that Escobar deserves every bullet that he takes--must be seen first as a triumph mainly for *the Colombians*. It is a triumph of that nation's will to attempt to regain control of its destiny.

Killing Pablo so concentrates on the hunt for Escobar that the reader might wonder why the U.S. is so determined to get him. After all, the people he orders shot or bombed are not Americans. Nonetheless, the hunt becomes an end in itself for the U.S. government and its Colombian allies. Bowden unconvincingly points to the downing of an Avianca Airliner with two U.S. citizens on board, but offers very little about the effects of Colombian drugs in the U.S. at the time. Escobar rises to his greatest power during the crack cocaine epidemic that devastated large communities within U.S. society. To write about Escobar and his actions while almost ignoring cocaine is like watching the film *The Hunt for Red October* without a submarine.

Some 10+ years ago, drug traffickers and Marxist guerrilla groups like the FARC would often have shoot-outs with each other. Today, the FARC and other guerrilla groups double as drug trafficking cartels. The irony in his story, and Bowden is the first to admit it, is that the killing of Escobar did not decrease the amount of illicit drugs shipped from Colombia to the U.S., nor did it make Colombia safer for its citizens. Killing the man from Medellín even made Colombia safer for the competing Cali cartel. In 2002, the amount of cocaine going to illicit markets in the U.S., Western Europe, and Brazil/Argentina is greater than ever.

With compelling you-are-there dialogue in both, *Shadow Warriors* and *Killing Pablo* are first-rate suspense stories. Both Bowden and Clancy/Stiner portray the bad guys from around the world as greedy and violent. In the case of many, such as Panamanian strongman Noriega, they are physically repulsive as well. Both books oversimplify often-complex cases to portray them as good vs. evil. Thus, squeamish liberals can relax and enjoy, provided they do not ask questions; knuckle draggers can simply cheer on the "good" guys. Both Clancy and Bowden love technological detail as they talk about the courageous men and their tough toys.

Bowden's exclusive focus on Colombia spotlights Clancy/Stiner's virtual failure to note any SOF efforts in Latin America aside from Panama in 1989. This is counterintuitive since Latin America should have been on Clancy's mind. After all, he ostensibly wrote the aforementioned novel and screenplay *Clear and Present Danger*, much of which takes place in Colombia. Moreover, "Plan Colombia" and its \$1.3 billion in aid, some of which is used by SOF, was regularly in the news when *Shadow Warriors* was being written.

The Clancy/Stiner book claims to be encyclopedic, while in fact it is Middle East-centric. In its "historical" section, for instance, the glaring omission of the killing at La Higuera in 1967 of Ernesto "Che" Guevara in an impressive combined ranger and air-mobile operation is disappointing. There is ample unclassified information on Special Forces (SF or "Green Berets") and CIA support to the Bolivians. This operation should have been cited as an example of successfully using a handful of highly trained, language proficient and culturally sensitive SF as a force multiplier. This is one of the things that SOF are all about.

In fact, the successful crushing of a communist insurgency in South America's poorest and most corrupt country at a time when Guevara and Fidel Castro were talking of creating "many Vietnams" stands as one of the few unqualified U.S. successes of the Vietnam era. Army SF continue to be active and effective in Bolivia to this day, mainly in the counter-narcotics field.

Although Bowden's book was published one year before *Shadow Warriors*, Clancy's only mention of Colombia was to refer to SF health and education teams sent there in the 1960's. Clancy/Stiner state that with SF help, "*La violencia*" in Colombia ended. Although Colombia experienced a downsurge of fighting in the late-1960's through the 1970's, the extreme violence within that society never stopped. Indeed, the FARC and M-19 are very active today and claim a bloody heritage that goes back a half century. Thus, Clancy makes an implausible claim and then ignores the recent work SOF have done in Colombia that is chronicled so well by Bowden.

The Clancy/Stiner book also fails to provide any detail on extensive U.S. support for the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980's. Admittedly a more controversial and less successful effort, there are important insights to be gained. In defense of Clancy, however, most authors on SOF issues, such as William H. McRaven who uses case studies in *Spec Ops* and Colin S. Gray in the seminal *Explorations of Strategy* (half of this work is on SOF), ignore Latin America. USSOCCOM does not; for instance, the Army's 1400-strong 7th SF Group is devoted only to Latin America and particularly works with Andean Ridge countries.

Both *Shadow Warriors* and *Killing Pablo* are admirably researched. Neither ignores the inter-agency feuding and backbiting that are necessary to understand the story. Sadly, Clancy cannot resist his long-established pattern of unfair swings at the State Department. This undercurrent is found in most of his books that glorify the CIA and use of force while disparaging diplomacy as ineffectual effort by dilettantes. For instance, when the TWA 847 hijacking began, he claims nobody at the State Department with sufficient rank to make a decision was available. He then sniffs that most of the staff at the U.S. Embassy in Algiers "had taken off to Mediterranean beaches for the weekend."

The first charge simply is not true. As for the latter, less the duty section, the beach is one place where staffers at a difficult post *should* go on the weekend. To their credit, however, Clancy/Stiner do mention that 60 people are killed in a truck bomb attack at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut two months before the Marine Barracks is hit by a similar attack killing 241. So often, the Beirut Marines are remembered, but not the U.S. Embassy in Beirut.

Both books raise the question of the appropriateness in some cases of whether U.S. assets should be used in ways that may be considered morally repugnant. For instance, U.S. intelligence in Colombia often is passed to "*Los Pepes*," an organization of relatives and friends of Escobar's numerous victims. They in turn use it to locate and kill operatives, lawyers, bankers and sometimes even *family members* of Escobar's organization. In one case, two of

Escobar's horse trainers and his championship stallion are kidnapped. The bodies of the men are found two days later. The horse is also found--healthy, but now a gelding incapable of use as a stud. These murders are an important ingredient in Escobar's downfall. Bowden downplays the inconvenient fact that many of these "good" killers are rival drug traffickers who benefited by having a de facto hunting license coupled to world class intelligence support courtesy of the U.S. government.

Bowden notes that Colombia's society is engulfed in an all-out war. Certainly without defending every killing, he builds a persuasive case that the U.S. does the right thing. Clancy's right wing, no-apologies political views are well known but also well defended; Clancy/Stiner assume the U.S. is always right. As do many federal officials, Clancy and Stiner often chafe at legal restraints that prevent U.S. officials from doing what they *know* to be clearly in the national interest.

Despite ample scope for valid criticism, both books offer excellent, informative reading. Given the general nature of *Shadow Warriors*, the reader might enjoy reading it first before launching into the more specific *Killing Pablo*. Given the post-September 11 environment and the steps the U.S. government is likely to consider around the world, the skills and courage of SOF are certain to be critical tools for the U.S. government for years. Both books are important sources of information on little-understood SOF concepts and issues.

Nonetheless, almost equally important in an information-overload world, both Bowden and Clancy are such good storytellers. Either book can be read in bed, even late at night after a hard day...without falling asleep. They are that good! Highly recommended!

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- Colonel Donn “Kegs” Kegel, Special Operations Command Chair, National War College, National Defense University, Washington, DC.

Although not formally mentioned, he was an important source. The author notes that Colonel Kegel may not necessarily agree with the judgments and conclusions expressed.